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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 003177

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/07/2015

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PINS](#) [PBTS](#) [SY](#) [TU](#) [SYRIA](#)

SUBJECT: TURKISH MFA AND MILITARY ON SYRIAN MISSILE LAUNCH

(U) Classified by Polcounselor John Kunstadter; reasons: E.O. 12958, 1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (C) Summary: Despite a blase official statement and light media coverage, Turkish MFA official says privately that the MFA considers as "serious" Syria's May 27 missile launch that resulted in one missile going astray over Turkey and scattering debris. MFA is not satisfied with the Syrian explanation of the incident and is awaiting a report from the Turkish military before deciding what further reaction to recommend to FM Gul. End Summary.

MFA Calls in Syrian Ambassador, Issues Blase Statement

2. (U) The Turkish MFA called in the Syrian Ambassador on May 27 and again on May 30 regarding Syria's May 27 missile launch that scattered debris in Turkey. The MFA issued a blase statement on May 28 noting that debris had fallen on Turkish territory, and the Syrian Embassy attributed the incident to an "individual mistake" occurring during a "training exercise" and apologized.

3. (C) However, according to MFA Middle East Department Head Bozay, the Syrian Embassy's first response to the MFA was to deny Syria had anything to do with the missile. Their second response was that only one missile was launched. The third time, the Syrians came clean, admitted to three launches, and apologized. Turkey is keeping open its right to claim compensation for the incident, although Bozay doubts there will be any compensable damage.

4. (U) Coverage of the incident in the Turkish media, much of which is intimidated by or beholden to the AKP government, has been light. There was no op-ed commentary on the incident until June 7, when mass circulation daily "Sabah" columnist Erdal Safak remarked how odd it was that Turkey calmly accepted the Syrian apology. He noted that this would not have been the reaction had the incident involved Greece. Safak, normally writing with an anti-American edge, concluded his column with an unusually sympathetic assessment of the U.S. stance: "The U.S. is certainly not wrong to be wary of Ankara's relations with Damascus."

MFA "Not Satisfied" with Syrian Explanation

5. (C) According to Bozay, the MFA is "not satisfied" with the Syrian explanation. The MFA is awaiting a Turkish military investigation into technical details of the launch, including the type of missile involved and its exact flight path over Turkey. Asked what the political consequences of the incident will be, Bozay said the MFA recommendation to FM Gul will depend on the results of the military's investigation. However, Bozay several times characterized the event as "serious" and said it damaged Turkish "confidence" in the SARG.

Military Reaction

6. (S) TGS/J5 Strategy Chief MG Cengiz Arslan told PolMilCouns on June 2 that, while he does not have direct responsibility for the incident (Turkish military intelligence has the lead), he understood the Syrians had made a mistake. That said, the headquarters was buzzing with activity the afternoon of the launch. Several explanations were examined and rejected a deliberate provocation, the beginning of a military coups, etc. Arslan said TGS concluded it was an accident. No one they approached in Damascus initially knew of the incident because, he said, the unit that had fired the missile was afraid to report that they made a mistake. When PolMilCouns pressed how such a significant mistake could occur, Arslan said he had had an artillery unit under his command that had ended up aiming in the wrong direction because someone forgot to add 180 degrees to the formula used in calculating trajectories. He surmised that a Syrian unit could make the same mistake, intending to fire southeast instead of northwest.

Comment

7. (C) PM Erdogan, FonMin Gul, and the AKP government's chief foreign policy advisor Davutoglu firmly defended the AKP government's pro-Assad line to a series of Codels the week of

May 30. However, the Syrian missile incident has given room to some who question the wisdom of AKP's policy to break through the wall against criticism that AKP has tried to build in front of the Turkish media.

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